

G. Faure (2015) How to address up-scaling and sustainability of innovative advisory services : the case of management advice for family farms in Africa.

22th European Seminar for Extension and Education, 28th April– 1st May 2015,
Wageningen (Netherland)

In Africa exists a plurality of forms of advisory services (AS) provided by several actors. In this context experiments in MAFF (Management Advice for Family Farms) for nearly two decades in many Francophone African countries have sought to promote a new form of comprehensive advice to farms, using innovative methods based on learning theories and management cycles. MAFF programs aim at strengthening farmers capacities to better manage their resources based on their own objectives. Such an approach recognizes the importance of farmers' knowledge which is combined to external knowledge. This approach represents a rupture comparing to the transfer of technologies approach which remains dominant in many African countries.

However, these programs provide advice to a limited number of farmers in comparison with the large population of family farms in Africa and these programs remain fragile due to a high dependence on international funding. Questions now arise on how to increase the number of producers with access to MAFF and how to improve institutional and financial sustainability of advisory services. The objective of the paper is to analyse the conditions to scale up and scale out new advisory approaches which have been proven relevant at an experimental stage.

To address this question there is a need to have an holistic analysis and to take into account four main criteria : (i) the modalities of mechanism of governance, (ii) the funding modalities, (iii) the modalities for capacity and skill building for advisers and stakeholders involved in AS governance, and (iv) the modalities to adapt advisory methods to regional or national advisory systems. We carried out a participatory evaluation of a dozen of existing MAFF experiments in western Africa in order to identify the constraints and perspectives to scale them up and/or out and to improve the sustainability.

The results show that scaling out and scaling-up issues is not a mere question of increasing the resources of service providers to be able to provide MAFF to a larger group of farmers. It entails to address the institutional dimensions of advisory services and to progressively enrol different categories of actors (NGO, Farmers' Organizations, public advisory services, down-stream firms, etc.) to orient the advisory services if they are in charge of monitoring and assessing advisory services or to reshape their advisory services by designing new approaches to provide advice. Multistakeholders platforms to share experiences on innovative advisory services and new public policies (funding mechanisms, training, certification of advisory services, etc.) aiming at supporting innovative advisory services are key elements to address scaling up and scaling out issues.

In the case of MAFF, there are evidences of the need to strengthen the role played by Producers' Organizations in the governance mechanisms in order to better orient advice, reduce the costs and increase the sustainability beyond the projects' investments. Farmer extension workers appeared as a key factor for sustainability and extension of advisory services to a larger audience. New promising opportunities to train advisors are observed in order to better insert training programmes in permanent national organizations. Funding of advisory services remains a challenge even if some relevant experiences do exist. Efforts are made in reshaping delivery models with less costly and time-consuming methods.